personal attendance mandatory for submission of applications for passport or collection thereof. As per the existing policy, an applicant has the option to submit the application for a fresh passport or renewal thereof through an authorised agent/ representative. In the case of first issue of passport, it is sent by post at the address given by the applicant, unless he wishes to collect it in person.

(c) As per the guidelines issued by the Government, which are in effect from 1.8.2000, all travel agents who were recognised by the Government between 1986 and 23.7.1992 and the travel agents who are registered with IATA (International Air Transport Association) and are members of either TAAI (Travel Agents Association of India) of TAFI (Travel Agents Federation of India) are allowed to submit passport application forms to the concerned Passport officers.

(d) Not applicable.

Appointment of Tamil knowing High Commissioners in Singapore and Malaysia

2563. DR. K. MALAISAMY: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware that the Tamils are in association with Singapore and Malaysia for more than 150 years and Tamil language had been given official language status there, whereas the Ministry never seems to have given any weightage at all in appointing Tamil knowing High Commissioners in these countries with the result the local Tamils have no local rapport at all with our High Commissions;and

(b) whether in the light of trade and commerce for which top priority being given, would there be a move hereafter to appoint Tamil knowing High Commissioners in these countries?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI RAO INDERJIT SINGH): (a) The Government is fully aware of the presence of the people of Indian origin, including Tamil speaking, settled in Singapore and Malaysia as well as official recognition of Tamil language in these countries. Our Missions in these countries have always maintained a close rapport with all sections of the Indian Diaspora.

(b) Heads of Mission are appointed keeping in view a wide range of qualities and qualifications which are not limited to the knowledge of languages alone. However, Tamil speaking officers have also been posted to Singapore and Malaysia on various occasions.

Seizure of Fishing Boats and Fishermen

2564. SHRIV. HANUMANTHA RAO: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have made any plans to discuss with Pakistani authorities the issue of seized fishing boats and arrested fishermen;

(b) whether Government have done any study of how many fishing vessels have been seized by neighbouring countries during the last two years;

(c) if so, the details of the findings of this study;

(d) what help is being given to the owners of such seized fishing vessels;

(e) whether any scheme would be drawn up to help the fishing sector meet the problems caused by neighbouring countries; and

(f) if so, the details of steps proposed in this regard ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI E. AHAMMED): (a) Yes, Sir. Government is consistently taking up the issue of seized fishing boats and arrested fishermen through diplomatic channels, both in New Delhi and Islamabad, and during high level contacts from time to time.

(b) Yes. Sir.

(c) Presently, there are about 198 Indian fishing boats in Pakistan and 75 fishing boats in Sri Lanka. In Bangladesh, 2 Indian fishing boats are known to be detained.

(d) Nil

(e) and (f) The fishermen having mechanised boats of less than 20 metre length are helped by Ministry of Agriculture, Department of Animal Husbandry & Dairying through a centrally sponsored scheme on Safety of Fishermen at Sea under which the fishermen are provided with financial